



The Home of the Intrepid

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio is the most important military medical training and treatment facility in the world.

The Fort was built in 1875, but its roots date back to arrival of the first U.S. soldier in Texas in 1845. From 1910 until World War II, Fort Sam was the largest Army post in the continental U.S., and played a key role in the beginnings of military aviation.

Since the mid-1940s, Fort Sam has been the nucleus of U.S. Army medicine. The base spans 3,000 acres and employs more than 27,000 military and civilian personnel.

Now the Fort has a new distinction: It's the location for the world's most technologically advanced rehabilitation facility for American warriors wounded on duty, particularly in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Our generation is engaged in a deadly war on terrorism. Thousands of our finest young men and women have been injured in operations abroad, including hundreds of amputees and burn victims.

These wounded men and women deserve the very best facilities, and the "Center for the Intrepid" certainly delivers. Last month, inspiring dedication ceremonies were held in San Antonio, officially opening a four-story, 65,000-square-foot rehabilitation facility adjacent to Brooke Army Medical Center.

It offers state-of-the-art physical and occupational therapy and psychological counseling resources to amputee and burn victims. Facilities include an indoor running track, a firing range, an Olympic-sized pool, a two-story climbing wall and other notable rehabilitation benefits.

Modern technology is evident throughout. The Center's "computer assisted rehabilitation environment," known as CAREN, is as advanced as any facility in the world. CAREN provides virtual landscapes that simulate everything from a city sidewalk to a peaceful lake. Rehabilitation patients use the unit to improve their gait and balancing skills.

The Center reflects our nation's gratitude for the bravery, patriotism and service offered by our troops.

Another positive aspect of this cutting-edge project is that it was made possible through the generosity of individual citizens, rather than relying solely on the government.

Resources for the \$50 million facility came from the hearts and pockets of an estimated

600,000 Americans who donated anything from pennies to millions of dollars. The Center is the largest single private contribution to our nation's wounded military.

The fundraising campaign was led by philanthropist Arnold Fisher of New York and the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund. In addition, the Center opened along with two new 21-bedroom Fisher Houses, which provide temporary accommodations for visiting family members.

Earlier this month, I had the honor of visiting a number of our superb soldiers and marines, including some from Texas, who were wounded in Iraq or Afghanistan and are undergoing treatment at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. I was able to discuss career options and future plans with several patients and their families on the wards, and with men and women undergoing rehabilitation in the Physical and Occupational therapy clinics.

I was impressed with the optimism and spirit of these great Americans. I hope that at least some of them will be able to utilize the great advantages of the new Intrepid Center at Brooke Army Medical Center for their future rehabilitative care.

The Intrepid Center will be a great asset for our service members for years to come as we care for those on the front lines of the global war on terror.

It's heartening that so many individual Americans are eager to show their appreciation to those defending our freedom. Our nation has a solemn duty to provide for our troops, and the government can never do enough to demonstrate our gratitude for their sacrifice. But voluntary points of light made the Intrepid Center possible, and that spirit of shared mission makes our country even greater and stronger.

Sen. Cornyn serves on the Armed Services, Judiciary and Budget Committees. In addition, he is Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Ethics. He serves as the top Republican on the Judiciary Committee's Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship subcommittee and the Armed Services Committee's Airland subcommittee. Cornyn served previously as Texas Attorney General, Texas Supreme Court Justice and Bexar County District Judge.

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